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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

ROUSSEAU AND ROMANTICISM. By Irving Babbitt. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Professor Babbitt's new book, mainly about Rousseau, is essentially an acute diagnosis of romanticism,—an examination of its underlying ideas and motives and of their results. The book belongs to that part of philosophy which is normally included in literature and in literary criticism, and which does not necessarily involve metaphysics. This is well. Literary criticism must be a criticism of ideas, and as such should go beyond the limits of mere "appreciation;" yet it is most useful when it stops short of the profound and abstract speculations of the professional philosophers.

The author begins by distinguishing between the two laws, as indicated by Emerson—the human law and "the law of thing." To the latter belongs science—and also romanticism. Romanticism is, therefore, so far as it is a philosophy, an attempt to extend the "law of thing"—or more accurately the law of the flux, with which science properly deals, into a province in which it has no efficacy. In order to escape from the romantic error, we must, thinks Professor Babbitt, be not less "modern," but more so. We must be more modern than the romanticists and the scientific philosophers by becoming more critical; in other words, we must recognize the human law, as well as the natural law, as a part of experience. The author would have us avoid the mistake of those modern thinkers who "are seeking to build up their own intoxication with the element of change into a complete view of life, and so are turning their backs upon one whole side of experience." Appealing to experience, he asks what are the results of "Rousseauistic living." "The supreme maxim of the ethical positivist, he declares, is: By their fruits ye shall know them"—a point of view which, carried into criticism, produces conclusions that are sane and illuminating.

A critical method, however, though it may be fundamentally experimental, really requires some sort of philosophic basis—some doctrine in regard to our knowledge of the nature of things; and this Professor Babbitt, in his positivistic way, supplies. The doctrine of "the two infinities"—the infinite of desire and the infinite of measure and restraint—is of the utmost significance, and the author scores admirably when he declares that this doctrine is "not abstract and metaphysical [both words, by the way, should be in quotation marks, since there is no ground for assuming that what is "abstract" and "meta-

physical" is *not* experiential], but bears on what is most immediate in experience." Further than this, Professor Babbitt, taking up the problem of knowledge from the positivist standpoint, shows that any knowledge we may have of what is abiding is so mingled with illusion that it is only through the "right use" of illusion that we may grasp it at all.

Just at this point, it may be proper to say, the author's line of thought becomes a trifle confusing. The *imagination* seems so obviously the faculty by which illusion is produced, that in what Professor Babbitt says of this faculty it would seem as though he meant that it is by the imagination, solely or especially, that we may through illusion get at the true infinite—at the perception of what is abiding. If one attempts any precise definition of the imagination, or of the part it plays in thinking, this point of view becomes a bit difficult to follow. It is true that the author insists that imagination must be guided and guarded by sound analysis, by an able Socratic dialectic—and that his whole treatise is testimony to the value of this humanistic logic. But the query arises, whether the clear-cut distinction that he is able to make between the "Rousseauistic imagination" and the "ethical imagination" is worth the psychological confusion which the employment of the word "imagination" in a rather doubtful sense involves. The imagination surely is not the special organ of intuition. Would it not be simpler and better, one asks—despite the considerable part that imagination plays in all thinking, and the excessive part that it plays in Rousseauistic thinking,—to say simply that we get at our sense of the true infinite through the whole mind, informed by moral intuition: "Thinking is a matter of the whole man."

However this may be, Professor Babbitt's premises are sufficiently simple and sufficiently sound. In applying them to Rousseau and the romantic movement, he is not simply slaying the slain. So multifarious is the romantic error, so persistent is it in all its various forms that every new analysis of it has independent value and fresh interest. The warfare against romanticism can no more cease than can the clerical warfare upon sin. Acute, right-minded persons have always some new thing that is worth saying to say about both.

In logical analysis and in appreciation of human motives Professor Babbitt excels most critics who have dealt with this subject. Logically his disquisition upon the word "romantic" is admirable. His humanistic standpoint, his broadly critical view, gives him an advantage over most in dealing with the romantic imagination, with romantic morality, with romantic love, with romantic melancholy and romantic irony. Very acute, for example, is the author's development of the connection between emotional misanthropy and the worship of wild nature, very practical as well as profound his explanation of the relation between the unethical and a-centric imagination and the romantic sense of solitude and nostalgia. Professor Babbitt has somewhat less of a certain theological attitude than has, for one, Paul Elmer More, among Dualists; his dualism scarcely calls for the epithet "savage." In his treatise the commonly experienced and valued quality of "decorum" is as much insisted upon as the somewhat fearfully abstract "inner check." It is to the whole of human wisdom and experience that Professor Babbitt refers for confirmation rather than to

an implacable and inexplicable force within us. To say the least, his stopping somewhat short of religion or of rigid moral dogma makes Professor Babbitt's treatise persuasive and humanly serviceable.

So sound as far as it goes, so wholesome and practicable, so necessary in the present period, is the dualistic point of view, especially in its humanistic development as the wisdom of inner experience illustrated in action, that it is only with the greatest hesitation that one may venture to suggest certain doubts as to its complete sufficiency. In a tentative way, however, these doubts may perhaps be briefly outlined.

"All children, nearly all women, and the vast majority of men," says Professor Babbitt, with an irony that matches the romantic irony, "are, and probably always will be, romantic." If Romanticism is really so bad a thing as it is represented to be, is not this pronouncement dogmatically pessimistic? So clear-headed a dualist as Paul Elmer More has declared, indeed, that in regard to the question why the "Inner Check" sometimes acts and sometimes fails to act, we are hopelessly in the dark, and must always remain so. Whence this evil tendency in mankind? It is unexplained, and hence seems incurable, except by intervention of Divine Grace or of the equally arbitrary "Inner Check."

It is doubtful that men can remain permanently satisfied with such a view—a view against which, as well as against the narrowness of pseudo-classicism, Rousseauism seems to have been a protest. "The majority of men are worthless," said some old Greek politician, disillusioned with democracy. But modern democracy rests upon the belief that the majority of men are fundamentally good. If to be romantic is to be unspiritual, and if the majority of men are hopelessly romantic, we seem to be not far from Oliver Cromwell's ideal of government by the "Godly Party": the rule of the Barebones Parliament could not be ultimately worse than the rule of a romantic mob.

Turning from this larger aspect of the question to the narrower field of literary criticism, one cannot help suspecting that the terms "classic" and "romantic," useful as they are in making broad distinctions, are not final. In actual literature the classic and the romantic elements interpenetrate in a way that makes it scarcely useful to attempt to disentangle them. Moreover there is an ethical type of "romance," though there is perhaps no ethical type of "Romanticism." Running through Professor Babbitt's discourse is the assumption that romance generally (so far as it is harmless) and the romantic element in ethical works of the imagination belong solely to "the recreative side of life." Does experience really confirm this assumption? On the contrary does it not appear that the romantic element strongly tends to be taken seriously, and that if it be not taken seriously it becomes deadily dull? Is there not a certain absurdity, even a hint of critical obtuseness, in the suggestion that Victor Hugo should be taken purely on the recreative side of life? If Wordsworth were thought of as pertaining to "a week-end view of life" could anyone endure to read him at all?

An acceptance of the dualistic standpoint would seem therefore to narrow our appreciation of literature by divesting much that is beautiful of that seriousness which is avowedly the very soul of its beauty. Keats as a week-end diversion is intolerable!

There are other considerations. What about the Don Quixotes of this world and the explorers who felt the lure of the unknown? What about the real geniuses who were not ethical but who paralleled upon a higher plane the achievements of instinct upon a lower plane? What about the magic of painting, as it appears in unclassic art, and the glamour of music? No one, it is probable, has ever been able to take these things in a purely recreative way. If glamour, if the mystery of light and color, are mere ornaments, they are nothing, and a society ought to be formed to prevent artists from pouring out their souls in a shameful expense of spirit; for without an expense of spirit these things will hardly be produced. Consider also the effect upon the mind of certain scenes in nature and of certain descriptions of nature. Coleridge's lines—

“ We were the first
That ever burst
Into that silent sea ”—

are purely romantic; they are instinct with the feeling of boundlessness and its appeal to the human spirit. Whatever else these lines are, they have nothing to do with a week-end view of life. Really to love such lines as these is perhaps dangerous, but to regard them as merely pretty or entertaining would be silly.

In short: is not the “eternal urge,” as well as the “Inner Check” a “spiritual” phenomenon—a question ambiguous, no doubt, and difficult to answer, but real. Useful as the distinction between man's “two natures” may be in guiding and judging men's characters, is it after all final? Is there not some way, one asks, without sacrificing that moral intuition which seems to have made its appearance at the same time with the human mind, or that hard-won humanism embodied in classic literature, without giving up the urbanity of Horace, the *severitas* of Caesar, or the self-denying love enjoined by the Founder of Christianity; is there not some way of believing with Rousseau that the majority of men are naturally good, and of retaining as part of their goodness that restless, questing spirit to which romance appeals?

AUTHORITY IN THE MODERN STATE. By Harold J. Laski, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mr. Laski's analysis of authority in the modern state is pragmatic; it aims to avoid complications with theories which in attempting to determine the derivation of state authority, or to describe what it ought to be, produce conclusions inconsistent with the truth regarding the actual working of authority in the state and with its actual growth. This analysis leads, as pragmatic analyses generally do lead, to a pluralistic view.

To be sure there remains in Mr. Laski's theory a residuum of those truths which we have come to look upon as essential. Conscience remains: “The only permanent safeguard of democratic government is that the unchanging and ultimate sanction of intellectual decision should be the conscience.” And in this connection Mr. Laski points out very convincingly, and in words expressing, indeed, un-